

10-Boat Squadron Took First Coal Through Canal

Late 1828 Time Of First Shipment Of Anthracite Via D. & H. Canal For New York City Destination

The News presents today the third of a series of articles on the history of the Delaware and Hudson Canal, as written by E. D. LeRoy, member of the board of trustees of the Wayne County Historical society, and appearing in the Monthly Bulletin of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Internal Affairs.

By E. D. LeROY
Member, Board of Trustees of
Wayne Historical Society

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Philip Hone was not amongst the passengers on the first packet. He was far too busy to spare the time to travel by canal boat, but he did arrive at Honesdale by stage on October 28, 1828, and after viewing the gravity railroad he began the return trip to New York, on horse back, along the tow-path of the canal. He was greatly impressed by "the stupendous rock work" at the Narrows of the Lackawaxen and the dam at the mouth of the Lackawaxen.

Again contrary to the report in the "Argus" the Gravity Railroad from Honesdale to the mines was nowhere near completion although a quantity of coal had been hauled over a hastily finished wagon road through Rixe's Gap to Honesdale where by late November, 1828, there was a sufficient quantity on hand to load ten small boats with ten tons each and start them on their history-making voyage to tide water.

In the lead of this small squadron was the "Superior" in command of Captain Hickson, followed in order by the "United States" commanded by Captain Cortwright; company boat number two commanded by Captain Lomeran and the "Oliver H. Perry" commanded by Captain Terwilliger. Unfortunately the names of the boats, composing the rest of the squadron, and their captains, have been lost in the passage of time.

As this little squadron passed through the various locks and towns, toasts were drunk to— (and by)—the captains and their crews in celebration of the great event,

and as the boats neared the end of the canal the Kingston band, which had come out to meet the flotilla, boarded the "Superior" and "accompanied it to Rondout amidst the playing of appropriate airs." At Rondout the boats were greeted by volleys of musketry fired in salute by the assembled militia following which there was a parade and—of course—many speeches. The orators of the day made many fabulous predictions of the future prosperity of the canal but, few if any, of those present that day realized how far short of the actual truth these seemingly fanciful predictions fell for not one, of the many who gathered to hear those speeches, could foresee that the canal, even if they could have imagined its final larger proportions, would be completely inadequate to carry the quantity of coal later demanded of it.

Coal For New York

The ten boats had arrived on December 5, 1828, and on that same day, ten tons of the cargo was transferred to the sloop "Toleration," the same ship which four years before, almost to the day, had brought the first sample of "Lackawaxen Anthracite" to the City of New York by way of Philadelphia. The "Toleration" arrived in New York five days later and part of the cargo was sent without delay to the Western Hotel on Cartlandt Street where a grate had been prepared to demonstrate the great advantages of coal over wood. Later another grate was set up in the company's offices on Wall Street. A part of the first hundred tons to reach Rondout was shipped to Albany for use by Governor Martin Van Buren and members of the Legislature who had been so helpful but although the practicability of anthracite coal as a fuel had by now been conclusively demonstrated, the public was still reluctant to accept the new fuel and so, ironically enough

the canal, which had been built, primarily for the purpose of hauling anthracite coal, hauled far more cord wood than coal during the first two seasons of operation.

Again we have from the Albany "Argus" for December 20, 1828:

"The public scarell seems aware that a canal 108 miles in length commencing at tidewater, near Kingston, and terminating at the forks of the Dyberry in Pennsylvania (at which place a thriving village is already established called Honesdale), has been completed since October—and this great work has been accomplished principally by the enterprise of an individual company. The first squadron of boats loaded with coal arrived at Tidewater on the 5th instant. Fifty tons have been consigned to Messrs. Townsends of this city which will afford our citizens an opportunity to test its quality."

Originally Four Feet Deep

The canal as originally constructed was four feet deep, 20 feet wide at bottom and 32 feet wide at the water line. There was a wooden aqueduct 224 feet long over the Neversink River, supported on stone piers, one over Rondout Creek, entirely of stone having two arches one of 50 foot the other of 60-foot chord. There were in addition ten other smaller aqueducts of varying length, all of wood supported by stone abutments but the first twenty years of operation there was no aqueduct across the Delaware. In its place the boats were poled across the lake formed by the dam just below the mouth of the Lackawaxen River. After crossing the Delaware they entered directly into the canal and immediately ascended a series of six locks.